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PROFESSIONAL STUDY.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

THE OPENING OF THE FIFTEENTH ANNUAL SESSION

OF THE

Halifax Medical College,

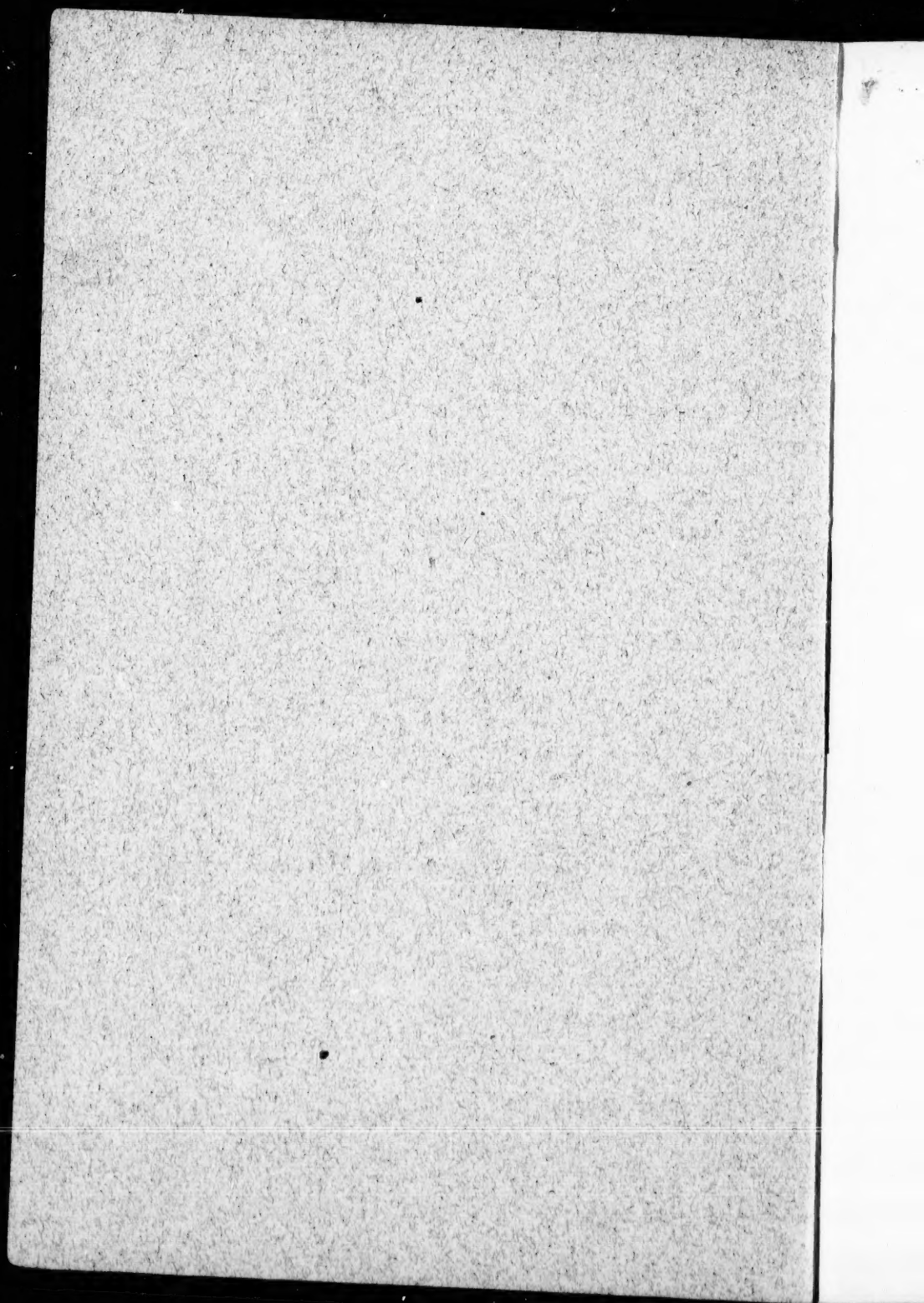
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GENTLEMEN,—

According to what, as I am assured, is an invariable rule in Medical Colleges, an introductory address is delivered at the beginning of each session, to the gentlemen who are about entering upon the study of those complex matters which go to make up the education of medical men. The strictness of this rule, but, more especially and directly, a certain inexorable determination on the part of my colleagues, must explain my appearing before you in this present capacity; but no consideration whatever can enable me to feel otherwise than diffident in approaching the task which my associates have imposed upon me; for, amongst other disqualifying conditions, I cannot help realizing how difficult it is for a member of a profession different from that which you are choosing, appropriately to make use of the opportunity afforded him of saying a word in season to you. Yet I deem it no small honour to have been chosen to address you, and it gives me great pleasure to think that I may, perhaps, be able to say something which shall be of use to you, or at least to some of you.

First, let me on behalf of the faculty, offer you a warm and kindly welcome to the Halifax Medical College. This indeed I can easily do, for my connection with this College has given me the warmest interest in its progress, and the kindest feelings towards its students; but when I realize that he who

addresses a number of young men on an occasion such as this has not only to welcome them to the place where they may learn, but to give them some hints as to how they are to learn; not only to wish them a safe and pleasant journey, but to some extent to show them the way, I cannot help experiencing real and unmistakeable misgivings.

Why?

Because the work you are commencing is made up of so many elements as regards the qualities of mind and heart which it calls for, and because I know that the region you are about entering is difficult to explore, with its elaborate and every day extending gardens of scientific knowledge, its great empiric domains, and its yet dark and mysterious fastnesses whose hidden depths the plummet of man has never sounded.

Do not think, gentlemen, that the matters you will have to deal with are all established and certain, or that the requirements of life in a professional school are fulfilled by a continued state of receptivity in which the teacher doles out and the student takes in so much knowledge per diem. That may be to a large extent the case in merely academic institutions, where perhaps a nearer relationship of pupilage exists between teacher and student, and where the subjects of study are more abstract and are not directly connected with the practical aspects of life.

Heretofore your education has been confined to branches of knowledge, for the most part, requiring only a quick and retentive memory and the ability, as in mathematics, to deduce results from facts unequi-

vocally presented to the mind. But now you are going beyond the soundings of certainty. You shall have not merely by effort of memory to learn the peculiarities of a language or by processes of induction to demonstrate a proposition, but you must investigate the facts themselves—some of them facts of the most perplexing and occult character. You shall have to judge for yourselves how many of the inferences which may be presented to you in books and lectures are justified by these facts, and you will find it necessary to decide for yourselves between many inconsistent theories. Thus it is that many who come from school or college “bearing their blushing honors thick upon them,” fail at law or medicine, while others whose scholastic achievements have been comparatively insignificant, immediately display the possession and practice of certain habits of mind which enable them rapidly to rise to a foremost place as students and practitioners.

It is fitting therefore that now, at the beginning of your professional life, we should consider together for a little some few of the many matters which might appropriately be discussed on such an occasion.

First, let me remind you that just now an immense number, comparatively, are being admitted to the so called learned professions. Modern facilities for obtaining sufficient knowledge wherewith to pass the prescribed preliminary examinations have started scores on the way towards professional life, who, under other conditions, would have followed other pursuits. Without stopping to consider the effect which the masses of our people are

allowing the public school system, with other causes, to have upon the agricultural and industrial interests of this Province, (a grave theme and important in its proper place), let me point out to *you* that as there are greater numbers entering your profession, so there will be keener competition, both in study and practice, and a higher standard of excellence demanded for success. The general public, too, that imperious, impersonal and not even incorporated censor, has become more intelligent and more discriminating than of old, and the day has come when, in most cases at least, professional success must be based upon professional excellence. As in trade the day has gone by when a few so-called merchants could become rich without effort and without business training or enterprise, so in your profession and mine the day has passed when a practitioner could hope to enjoy the benefits of a reputation without attainments to support it.

I have already indicated to you that as students of medicine you will be called upon to exercise faculties and habits of mind which your experience and training heretofore have possibly failed to develop.

It is an old and true saying that "knowledge is power," but I have often thought that if this or any kindred maxim is responsible for the amount of blind unreasoning acquisition which has been accomplished by thousands of persons from time to time, it has a great deal to answer for, and is to be regarded as dangerous. Knowledge *is* power, gentlemen, but it is the knowledge which not only knows, but understands; not only recollects the fact, but appreciates

the principle; not only, like a parrot, makes an utterance, but experiences a living thought.

If we recall our notions as students so far, some of us will find that we have been accustomed to associate the idea of intellectual attainment with books, and with what has been obtained from books. This is well enough, but you must not fall into the error of relying upon books, through mere memory, as the means of equipping yourself for the duties of your profession. Beware of mere book knowledge, and of that condition which gave rise, no doubt, to another familiar maxim, namely, that "an ounce of common sense is worth a bushel of learning." Certain it is that education has too often taken the direction of mere scholastic attainment, and has tended too little to the development of independent thought and a critical habit. Consequently we are all more or less familiar with instances of great achievement in so-called scholarship, abruptly followed by conspicuous failure in other walks where something more has been called for than a capacity for the passive or even active ingestion of ready-made knowledge.

Now, if there is any one factor more valuable than another in the investigation and appreciation of truth, that factor is the ability to observe accurately, and if there is any one profession more than another in which accurate observation is important, it is the profession of medicine.

It would be difficult to mention any calling in which the habit of which I am now speaking is not either essential or eminently useful, but in dealing with the varied and equivocal subjects of medical

study it is simply indispensable. A bare enumeration of some of the principal divisions of these subjects will of itself indicate the scope there is before you for the exercise of the various senses which minister to this most useful faculty of the mind. Surgery, with its exquisite appliances and its both bold and delicate skill; physiology, with its marvels and mysteries of vital force and action; pathology, with its infinite varieties and complications of morbid anatomy; therapeutics, with traditional cures and scientific remedies; anatomy, with its wonderful dispositions and mechanisms of bone and nerve and muscle,—the simple mentioning of these subjects suggests even to persons like you and me, who must necessarily know but little of the matters involved, how much is to be learned in this profession by the thoughtful, earnest and interested use of the senses of which we are possessed.

It is not, however, enough to see with the eye, to feel with the hand, or to hear with the ear, nor even to remember what has been seen or felt or heard. There must be a tendency to connect existing conditions with antecedent or existing causes, and to explain the one by the other. There must be a practice, amounting to a habit, intuitively to look for a reason, and if possible to discover a principle in every phenomenon. Perhaps this habit of looking as it were involuntarily for a cause or reason for every fact is the most important element in what I mean when I speak of "observation." Without what the phrenologists call "causality," observation would lack its best element and could but supply the material

for a merely arbitrary memory that would be sorely taxed in carrying a burden which an intelligent appreciation of the real or even apparent relations of cause and effect would make light and easy.

If I read in a book about any matter I should remember, not because I have read, but because I have understood; not learned the fact alone, but the principle with it. Now, if I learn this principle otherwise I have learned all I could have got from the book. Thus observation serves the same ends at least as are served by books, yet somehow there seems to be a greater and more common deficiency amongst students in this matter than there is in mere book and memory work. Perhaps most of us are rather late in beginning to practice it, and possibly our preparatory study might be so modified in school and even in college as to bring about an improvement in this particular.

I do not forget that some persons are by nature more gifted in this respect than others, and that with some observation seems almost an instinct, while others appear to go through life with their eyes shut. Fortunately, however, this faculty, unlike some others, is capable of successful cultivation, so that no one with ordinary intelligence need despair of success if he but make an honest effort to achieve its best results. One thing is certain. A man who lives from day to day and year to year without reflectively seeing what he may see is as one blind, and his thoughts and acquirements will be circumscribed accordingly. Genius in some department of mental labor or devotion to some art or calling may perhaps

make men eminent without the qualities of which I am speaking, but without them no man can hope to be a very useful member of your profession or mine.

I would not, however, have you misunderstand me with regard to books. I do not wish to disparage books. Such a thing would be an ungrateful absurdity. What I do wish is to warn you against putting them in a wrong place, or in too high a place, amongst the means to knowledge of which they are only one.

Books are great elaborated catalogues of facts and fancies, reflections and explanations of thoughts and things, but they are not the original or primary sources of knowledge. They are not the fountains, but the streams. They are the expressions of facts, not the facts themselves, pictures, not realities, and until we can regard the realities themselves, be they of mind or matter, by the light of our individual reason, independently of the picture, our insight will be faulty and our knowledge insecure and incomplete.

It follows that your reading must be done reflectively and critically. At first, and until you become acquainted with technical terms, much will be obscure and the outlook will be dark, but you will soon feel more at home, and then, gentlemen, you must begin to think for yourselves as you read, just as you must think for yourselves while you observe conditions in the wards of the hospital or in the classes of the school. Do not swallow everything you find, even in a prescribed text book, without first seeing whether, and how, each matter commends itself to your comprehension. It is not well to run along the pages and

doubt nothing. The man who never doubts never understands.

But, gentlemen, I question if you can practice what I am now trying to preach without being thoroughly interested in what you are going to practice it upon.

It is easy to give advice and it is easy to resolve to act upon advice, but it is not easy for one to be thoughtful and observing without being interested in the subjects of observation. The senses, those wonderful ministers to the brain, must be presided over by an interested purpose or they will but half do their work. The eye may contain the picture, the ear vibrate to the sound, but the mind, if not alert with interest, will neither see nor hear to much advantage.

You must then be devoted to your profession. It must become, as it were, your second nature if you are to master what is involved in it.

Not to be a surgeon, not to be a physician, not to have a degree from this or any college or university, not to be permitted to practice medicine, must be your object, but simply to be skilled and wise, and, let me add, honest, in, perhaps, the noblest and most humane art to which man can devote himself.

On the other hand, if, after giving the study of medicine a fair trial—a careful, thoughtful trial—you feel convinced that you will be unable to get up a real interest in it, I should say, give it up and try something else.

But I think I could commend this habit of observation to you independently of merely professional or economic considerations.

What is there more calculated to give pleasure to a

well constituted mind than the intelligent contemplation of the various natural, social and artistic phenomena, which we may notice each day, whether they be within the scope of our respective callings or not? Which is better, from a merely æsthetic point of view, the listlessness of Sir Charles Coldstream, who looked into the crater of Vesuvius, and languidly gave utterance to the remark that there was "nothing in it," or the keen enjoyment which a healthy mind may experience in observing the ever changing aspects of men and things which even this little planet called the earth presents to us?

"Give me the man who can enjoyment find,
In brooks and streams and every flower that grows:
Who in a daisy can amusement see,
And gather wisdom from a floating straw.
His soul a spring of pleasure might possess,
Quite inexhaustible."

Before going further, gentlemen, let me congratulate you upon enjoying the privilege and upon being under the necessity of beginning and continuing for a time, the study of the principles of your profession in a school or college.

There is a calling, admission to which is sought for the most part by candidates whose best advantages have but consisted in a period of years of office drudgery and undirected groping 'mid vast and perplexing mazes of legal precept and principle; but from the disabilities of such a system, or want of system, your profession is now free. For medical students the days of pill rolling and tincture squeezing in a practitioner's office are at an end, but for students of law the days of unenlightened deed-copying and untutored writ-making still exist. You possess the great boon of having to acquire the outlines of your professional knowledge under the direct guidance, from the very

outset, of persons experienced in the theory and practice of the matters involved.

But this is not the only advantage afforded by the school or college system, as distinguished from the incidents and possibilities of solitary study. Besides having courses and subjects of study indicated and elaborated to you from day to day by teachers in the various branches, you will, if you please, have the benefit of constantly rehearsing your investigation with your fellow students and of discussing with each other, from time to time, the matters treated of in your classes and lectures. This is a privilege which, I think, is more to be valued than you may at first suppose. During the years which you are to give to preparing yourselves for admission to the practice of medicine you will hear hundreds of lectures; thousands of theories will be expanded, and millions of facts will be presented to you; you will read many volumes, and see many sights, all involved in the span of your proper experience as students; but I venture to say that nothing will make a more lasting or available imprint upon your minds than the matters which, as students upon an equal footing, you may with interest and spirit discuss from time to time with one another. The quickening and stimulating effect of such intercourse, such generous but close debate as may take place amongst persons moved by a common incentive and gathered together to follow a common object cannot fail to be recognized and appreciated as a very important element in the favorable conditions which a school of professional training affords. Don't be afraid of giving your ideas to each other,

and do not suppose that because you are learners you cannot also be teachers. As all good teachers must be, and must continue to be learners, so all good learners in a school such as this will be teachers as well.

You have mistaken my meaning so far, if you do not see that we are all learners together and that the position of the teacher indicates a relative, not an absolute difference, from that of the student. A common feeling and a common object therefore should place us all in sympathy as seekers after the truths with which we shall have to deal, and here let me assure you that so far as the professors of this school are concerned, a real interest is taken by them in your progress, and that every effort which you may put forth, whether it take the form of independent investigation or interested and reasonable enquiry, will be appreciated and welcomed. Intelligent and enthusiastic learning calls for appropriate teaching, and conduct on the part of students, such as I have suggested, cannot fail to stimulate and encourage those who are called upon to discharge the duties of their guides and instructors. An experience of some few years in the Halifax Medical College enables me to say that, so far, the faculty have had little to complain of in this respect, but on the contrary dutiful interest and willing attention have characterized the class work from the inauguration of the school to the present time. So may it continue.

Another matter worth mentioning in this connection is, that after a little knowledge of each other you will discover pretty well your relative positions at your

work, and you may find by comparison wherein you are strong and wherein you are weak. You will be able to see and to realize, not only in your own case but in that of your fellows, the results for good and ill of various habits and tendencies. True, you may see examples which you had better not follow, but you will certainly, on the other hand, be encouraged by models of industry and stimulated by the incentive of friendly emulation. Moreover, you will obtain a notion of the scope and possibilities of your profession which no experience outside of such an institution could give you.

Seeing that these are some only of the advantages supplied by a Medical College, and that the collegiate system is at least equally appropriate to the subject of law, and that nevertheless few English law students have the benefit of such a system, you will not be surprised at being congratulated upon the difference which exists between the two professions in this respect.

But, gentleman, there is something else which I am induced to mention before leaving this matter of College training.

Nova Scotia is not a very large country and we cannot perhaps expect under present conditions to have an uncommonly large or numerous attended professional school of any kind in Halifax. Now what I wish to say is this: that whatever advantages small institutions and large institutions, as such, may possess over each other respectively, (and there is much to be urged in favor of each) one thing is clear.

namely: that a small class is a dangerous place for an able student; not necessarily a bad place, but a dangerous place.

It is sometimes a misfortune for a student to be at the head of his class, or to be able with comparatively little effort to be there. Such an experience is always a misfortune when it results in the student conceiving a mistaken notion of his relation to his profession, and to its really eminent and able members. But he will be safe if he compare his acquirements with all that he has not acquired; what he knows with the great mass of what he does not know; instead of resting with any degree of satisfaction upon a comparison between himself and a handful of his fellows. The most wholesome lesson for us to learn and to keep always in mind in this behalf is, that as yet we know but very little indeed, and that, notwithstanding any possible superiority whatever above our fellows for the time being, we are at best very ignorant, and should therefor, be very diligent and very modest. "*Qui nescit ignorare ignorat scire.*"

It is customary and appropriate on these occasions to say something about bodily exercise and physical culture; the proper relations of work and play; the bending and relaxing of mental energy; the balance to be preserved between the mind and its tabernacle. But here I encounter one of the confusing eccentricities of my present situation; for may it not appear presumptuous for a non-professional, as regards medicine, to venture to say a word about the conditions which are involved in the health of either the body or the mind? How dare I advise upon this point?

But, gentlemen, even a lawyer may say one or two things in this connection which some of you will do well to remember and act upon; and do not despise the advice because it is gratis. That is the only unique thing about it. For the rest, it is obvious and old.

In every college there are students who work very hard. There are also some who do not work very hard. If there are any of the latter class here they need not listen to what I am about to say. Now these hard working students must be cautioned against the possible results of too much brain worry, for both in arts and in professional study I have seen studiousness over done and have known evil to follow. We are nearly all familiar with some case of a probably poorly grounded academic, month after month and year after year, burning the midnight oil, and, with bandaged head and weary eye, driving his jaded faculties by sheer force of will, into the formalities of logic, the processes of mathematics or the classic beauties of ancient authors. We know too, that many students of law and medicine in such schools as this, for long periods, take too little respite from their labors, either for relaxation or positive rest, and that the result has been often apparent and sometimes deplorable.

Listen to what an old student, Professor Blackie, of Edinburgh, says: "It is a well known fact that the care of their health, or, what is the same thing, the rational treatment of their own flesh and blood, is the very last thing that students seriously think of, and the more eager the student the more apt is he to sin in this respect and to drive himself like an

unsignalled railway train to the very brink of a fatal precipice before he knows where he stands."

Now, gentlemen, without elaborating this matter, let me ask you seriously to consider it, and without pretending to offer you any specific directions let me beg of you to arrange for a proper and jealous disposition of some portion of your time each day for wholesome recreation according to your several tastes and individual tendencies, always taking care, however, to keep your recreation subordinate in interest and importance to your work as students. Remember that the "*mens sana in corpore sano*" is the utterance of a profound truth, and that no accomplishment in art, no discovery in science, no attainment in wealth nor triumph in professional life can ever compensate for lost health.

Gentlemen, let me caution you against prejudice. Professions and branches of professions, as well as individuals, are apt to entertain and foster intolerance; but bigoted prejudgment, or judgment without investigation, is consistent neither with reason or truth.

Your profession is becoming more scientific and less traditional and empiric each day. Though old as a calling it is yet young as a science, but its new life is rapidly becoming stronger. A scientific spirit now pervades the whole mass of the subjects of medical study, and we must recognize what science demonstrates, whether it is consonant with our preconceived notions or not.

If you would advance in your art, or even keep up with what is now going on in it, you must be willing and ready to receive knowledge by every avenue.

Discard no suggestion as too novel. Ignore no enquiry however minute and apparently unpractical, which may throw light upon the nature of disease. Do not despise as new-fangled or superfine any appliance which may make your discrimination as to morbid conditions more exact. Always separate observation and reason from tradition. Trust the one and distrust the other.

Before I close I wish to say a word of encouragement to you. I have told you and no doubt you have seen for yourselves, that the professions are being crowded now-a-days. Some of you may wonder how you are going to get into a practice, and how you are going to make a living after you have served your terms as students. I cannot take time now to discuss this. But I have time to tell you that so far as I have been able to observe, success depends upon personal merit, and that if a professional man has the affairs of his fellows entrusted to him, he is chosen, not from motives of friendship or charity, but because his clients or patients require, or think they require, his services. Human selfishness is perhaps the surest guarantee for human success. If you can show qualities which your fellows need to make use of these qualities will command their market value, and, unless you are kept back by some unfortunate idiosyncrasy, you will have a place in the great race of life. If you shall be well trained and capable professional men you will not fail. The world will always want, and will always recognize such men. I have no faith in the "village Hampdens and mute inglorious Miltons" who are supposed to

sleep in country churchyards. If you can make yourselves worthy you will not be consigned either to ingloriousness or obscurity.

A very few words on a matter I have not yet spoken of, and I have done. I have felt all through this address that I have been running the risk of appearing to sermonize. But I must run a still greater risk, and say to you—without, however, pretending to trespass upon the province of the reverend gentlemen I see about me—that intellectual accomplishment and bodily health are not alone what you require even for the purpose of succeeding in professional life. There is something more precious than riches, better than physical strength, and more beautiful than the triumphs of the mind. That something is goodness. Do not fear, I am not beginning a moral discourse. I am about saying the last words I shall have to say to you at the beginning of the work of your lives.

Let me close by impressing upon you that, while forms of faith and tenets of religion may be inconsistent with each other, while sects may wrangle and Church and state may rise, and fall, and pass away, goodness is eternal. Truth, honor, manliness, shall never pass away. Without these your life work must be a failure.

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